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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 000166

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [AM](#) [TU](#)

SUBJECT: TURKEY: "I APOLOGIZE" CAMPAIGN CATHARTIC, BUT  
COULD COMPLICATE NORMALIZATION WITH ARMENIA

REF: A. 08 ANKARA 2118

[1](#)B. ISTANBUL 28

[1](#)C. ISTANBUL 48

Classified By: POL Counselor Daniel O'Grady, reasons 1.4 (b,d)

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: The number of signatures attached to the on-line campaign apologizing for the "great disaster" suffered by Ottoman Armenians in 1915 has begun to taper off after reaching 30,000 -- a figure far exceeding the organizers' expectations. While criticized strongly by retired diplomats, nationalists, and even some liberals, the campaign -- against which the Ankara prosecutor dismissed an Article 301 complaint -- has contributed to a growing climate of openness and tolerance in Turkey, even as it may have complicated, to some degree, GOT efforts to normalize relations with Armenia. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (C) The "I Apologize" campaign ([www.ermenilerdenozurdiliyorum.com](http://www.ermenilerdenozurdiliyorum.com)), launched by liberal Turkish intellectuals and journalists in December 2008 (ref A), has attracted nearly 30,000 signatures, many from ordinary Turks unafraid to attach their names to such a controversial petition. While the pace of new signatures has tapered off, the number has greatly exceeded the organizers' expectations. Campaign organizers and prominent human rights activists Baskin Oran and Cengiz Aktar told us recently that the campaign has helped soften peoples' views on this "mother of all taboos," both inside and outside Turkey. Aktar believes the process actually began shortly after the Hrant Dink assassination. These activists, like their fellow organizers and other liberal intellectuals and journalists (ref B), believe strongly that reconciliation with Armenia and coming to terms with the Armenian question would be a huge catharsis for Turkey. And they think it's happening.

ANKARA PROSECUTOR DROPS ARTICLE 301 INQUIRY

[1](#)3. (C) In an important decision, the Ankara Public Prosecutor decided January 26 not to launch a Turkish Penal Code Article 301 investigation against the organizers and signatories of the internet campaign. His initial study into the matter had been prompted by a crime complaint submitted by six individuals. In previous years, the language in the campaign would have undoubtedly resulted in prosecutions and possibly even convictions (though jail time would likely have been waived). However, on this occasion, the prosecutor concluded that the Turkish state was not degraded by the campaign and noted in his statement that Turkish democracy was "open to adverse views," echoing remarks made by President Gul in December. The GOT last year amended Article 301 with an aim

to reducing the number of prosecutions. "Degrading Turkishness" was revised to degrading "the Turkish state," with the Minister of Justice required to approve any formal indictment. The amendment from "Turkishness" to "Turkish state," which was seen by many analysts as trivial when adopted, may have provided the prosecutor the leeway to drop the case in this instance. More importantly, the prosecutor's remarks about democracy's openness to adverse views may have set an important precedent, deterring future indictments.

"I APOLOGIZE" SPIRIT SPREADS

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¶4. (C) In a February 1 article in liberal "Radikal," Oran mused that virtue was contagious, describing how Diaspora Armenians would soon also be taking up the spirit of the "I Apologize" campaign and agitating their extreme nationalists, just as Oran and his co-organizers are agitating Turkish nationalists. He quoted Armenian-French journalist Jean Kehayan's "Letter to my Turkish Brothers," published in "Liberation," in which Kehayan wrote that a majority of French citizens of Armenian descent support their Turkish "brothers" in their struggle to demand only the historical facts, while rejecting efforts to take back territory or property. Oran was also pleased to highlight remarks by Californian Patrick Azadian, in which Azadian recalled that Hrant Dink, whose second death anniversary just passed (ref C), wanted Armenians to expand their identity beyond genocide, and supported freedom of expression for both those who defended or rejected genocide claims.

ANKARA 00000166 002 OF 002

¶5. (C) Oran further noted a draft declaration by Sydney-based Armenian activist Dr. Armen Gavakian, supported by some other Diaspora Armenians, apologizing for crimes committed on behalf of Armenians against Ottomans and Turks, including Armenian terrorist attacks against Turkish diplomats in the 1970s and 1980s. Oran predicted that Turkish nationalists would be shocked to read Armenian apologies for past crimes committed against Turks. He issued a challenge to the sixty retired Ambassadors who, in a strongly-worded statement, condemned the "I Apologize" campaign and asked who would apologize to the Turkish victims of Armenian crimes, in particular the dozens of Turkish diplomats and their family members killed and the hundreds wounded by Armenian terrorists. Having now received such an apology, Oran wondered if the retired diplomats would apologize to the campaign organizers, whom they had labeled as traitors.

COMMENT: CAMPAIGN COULD COMPLICATE  
TURKEY-ARMENIA NORMALIZATION PROCESS

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¶6. (C) Conciliatory statements by members of the Armenian Diaspora will not persuade retired Turkish ambassadors and other opponents of the "I Apologize" campaign to reconsider their stance, but may prove important if they can help soften it. The "I Apologize" campaign, by exercising the denialist camp and sharpening the nationalists' opposition to rapprochement with Armenia, has the potential to complicate Ankara's sensitive and ongoing negotiations with Yerevan, something the organizers surely did not intend.

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Jeffrey